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THE SCANDINAVIAN LANGUAGES IN MODERN LANGUAGE STUDY IN THE SCHOOLS

It is nearly six years now since the Scandinavian languages made their advent into our high schools. They had for a long time been offered in the curricula of many of our larger universities,¹ but with the exception of a few universities the courses were principally in Old Norse and advanced Scandinavian literature offered students in philology.

The languages had been taught as the second mother tongue in our Scandinavian denominational colleges and seminaries ever since their inception. Almost from the beginning of the more extensive Scandinavian immigration in the middle of the last century the two languages had been taught in our Scandinavian parochial schools, just as French and German had earlier been taught in similar schools and generally at the expense of English.

Not until these languages had entered the field of public secondary schools could it be said that they had entered the domain of Modern Language Study. French and German had entered this field about fifty years in advance of the Scandinavian languages and had gone through the various stages of development from early pioneer beginnings much as the Scandinavian languages in more recent years have progressed. It is not the purpose of this paper to record the growth of the study of the Scandinavian languages during the past six years, but rather to view in retrospect their place in Modern Language Study and if possible suggest some lines of procedure which shall ensure a healthy growth to the two youngest members of the group (Norwegian, Swedish).

This society has from time to time reviewed the progress made and shown some interest in the seeming progress. Loyal Scandinavians have at times aided in getting the languages introduced, but after being successful in launching them have abandoned them to shift for themselves. Small groups of teachers have struggled to do what they could to cope with the many difficulties. The Scandinavian Press has given welcome aid in the six years that have passed. Such is the brief story of it. What are the present needs?

We may first consider the teaching force at our command and the requirements necessary for good and successful teaching of the Scandinavian languages. The field being new the work naturally fell into the hands of teachers who had not been especially trained for this particular work. Some were perhaps proficient enough in the Scandinavian language to be taught, but lacked the necessary ability in English. Others had the necessary knowledge of English but lacked sufficient knowledge of Swedish or Norwegian to make successful teachers. The problem of supplying schools with good teachers therefore became a grave one.

A prime requisite, however, for teaching any subject in our American public schools is, first and foremost, a ready command of English, correct English, written and spoken. Some excellent teaching material has been lost to our cause because the training of the teacher had neglected the English. This has

¹ Since 1869 in Cornell University and Wisconsin University, and since 1880 in Columbia University. See article: "Nordiske Studier ved amerikanske Universiteter" in *Symra*, Decorah, Iowa, 1905.—Editor.

been a drawback so serious in some of the best high schools of our larger cities that it has almost led to the abandonment of the work entirely.

It would perhaps be a good and wise thing for our private denominational institutions to strengthen the English departments of their curricula and emphasize a little more the study of English grammar and English rhetoric and particularly emphasize clear enunciation and correct intonation if they wish to train their students to enter American public schools as teachers. Nothing is quite so much a criterion, by which applicants for positions are judged by those in authority, as ready command of English. A bright, cultured, prepossessing young man or woman with a broad knowledge of the elementary branches of study, even if possessed of only a limited knowledge of Swedish or Norse, has been able to do more for the cause than the most profound scholar who has a crude and limited knowledge of English. A good knowledge of the general subjects in a university course of study, some pedagogical training and accurate knowledge of cultured Norse or Swedish, even if somewhat limited in scope, should make a person entering the field a successful teacher in our schools. It is to be hoped that our universities will make greater efforts to prepare able young men and women to enter this special field of teaching, which is sadly in want of recruits.

Special courses should be offered in the Scandinavian branches to give readiness in refined speech. The teacher to be truly successful should be able to converse with ease in the foreign tongue and use it freely in the classroom so that the pupils may enter into the spirit of the language and gain the feeling and atmosphere of it, special effort being made to eliminate plebeianism.

The greatest need at present is strong, fearless, energetic teachers who can put the work on their own shoulders and carry it on to success, for with our deficient equipment and lack of adequate texts we must have teachers with initiative. To our universities we must look for just such recruits and I cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of offering just such courses in Scandinavian study as will equip young men and women to fill these difficult positions. To insure success the teachers should be trained to be masters of both English and the foreign language taught.

We next come to the question of proper text books, a problem which has been the constant concern of those who have been pioneers in the work.

Especially aggravating has been the question of reformed spelling. In Swedish the work has been made easier because here the issue of reformed spelling has been settled once and for all; but unfortunately in Norse we are still handicapped by the vacillating conditions of both the old and new. There should be a uniformly adopted norm for all schools throughout the country.

The Norwegian Press persistently adheres to the old orthography, and for purely financial reasons avoids all change, thus retarding the progress of the language work; we are in fact fifty years behind conditions in Norway. If the Latin type and the reformed spelling were uniformly adopted, much would be done to facilitate the work and make it more attractive for the younger generation. Let me say right here that there should be no delay in putting Professor Flom's *Synnøve Solbakken* into Latin type and reformed spelling. If this is not done, an excellent text will be lost to the work and become obsolete.

We are pitifully in need of adequate dictionaries in both languages. What can be done to relieve the situation? Encouragement should be offered the compilers of new texts. How can we expect scholars to devote time and energy to the compilation of new texts unless some assurance be given them that their texts will be published and published promptly? Appeals have come from many teachers for added aids, new texts. Brief stories from the mythology and elementary texts of Scandinavian history are needed if the literature is later to be grasped intelligently. The field of German and French teems with well-edited texts; not until the Scandinavian courses can offer something approximately similar, can the work hope to make much progress. To Americans the work seems now unreasonably difficult.

In recent years there has been quite a revolution in the method of teaching modern languages. The old formal and traditional methods have in many places been superceded by the more interesting and practical presentation. The direct method has in the study of French and German in many of our schools taken the place of the old theoretical. Some even go so far as to devote the entire first semester exclusively to the conversational method. Would this be advisable in the study of the Scandinavian languages? I believe not.

The majority who select the Scandinavian languages for their language study are of Scandinavian extraction, wholly or partly, and have in the home somewhat acquired a feeling for the structure of the language, although they may not have learned to speak, read, or write it. It is yet to a great extent a second mother tongue which they have acquired much as a polyglot. They do not need to translate their personality into the language. There is nothing which delights the students quite so much as to float on their previous superficial knowledge, and the exclusive use of the direct method yields but poor results. Theory must bring them what they lack, and daily practice in conversation must seek to eliminate plebeianism and give them added vocabulary so that the knowledge of the second mother tongue does not lack the cultural elements which we constantly strive for in their English. To their previous only partially correct and limited vocabulary of household terms and biblical language must be added proper terms of trade and business, technical phraseology and literary style.

Another phase which cannot be too strongly emphasized in the study is the comparative side, by which the students' English is improved—training gained also there. None of the advantages which a foreign language offers seem so prominent and important to me as this. I have observed that many of my pupils never fully comprehended the structure of the English language until they had taken Norse. The Scandinavian languages are unequalled as aids to English.

The question which confronts us is: What can the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study do for the advancement of the Scandinavian languages in Modern Language Study in the schools?

By means of its publication it can be of much influence and of great assistance to the teachers who are struggling with the problem.

The *Publications* might from time to time offer:

1. Articles on pedagogical questions directly affecting the present situation.

2. Lists of new texts and brief reviews of them thus enabling teachers to keep in touch with new materials offered.

3. Notes from the teaching field, so that teachers in the various sections of the country can keep in touch with the work done elsewhere and note the progress in other places.

4. Courses of study with all available texts suitable for the various courses offered. This would be a great help for new teachers and would be a guidance for them in beginning the work in new places.

5. Lists of books suitable for travelling libraries where Scandinavian books are not available. They would also be a guidance in selection of proper reading not only for the youth but the general public.

6. A book list of authentic and reliable literature in English on all phases of Scandinavian culture, literature, history, music, art social, and economic conditions, etc., etc. (Possibly matter under 3, 4, 5, and 6 should be issued as separate pamphlets.)

Moreover the society should create a teachers' bureau where might be registered the names of all teachers available for the work, with a record of their qualifications. If such a bureau were created much assistance could be rendered principals and school boards throughout the country in choosing teachers, and help young teachers in securing positions. If such a bureau were organized printed pamphlets and compiled statistics could be sent out to give the necessary information desired. This same bureau, or some committee should have in charge the work of keeping in touch with the National Educational Association and all state educational associations, which have in their territory fields of Scandinavian study. This committee should also make some effort to cause to be incorporated into the report of the United States Bureau of Education some account of the Scandinavian languages as part of Modern Language Study.

A text-book committee should have as its function the work of promoting the publication of new texts and other necessary material for the promulgating of the work. It should also be the duty of this committee to submit to the Society a uniform standard of reformed spelling as the standard to be followed in this country.

Much valuable work could be done by the Society to broaden the field by aiding citizens' committees and school boards in introducing the languages in places where they are not yet a part of the course of study. So vast indeed is the field that we cannot hope to do much in the immediate future to improve conditions, but we must be willing to act and we must begin at once.

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